

1 John 3 – Part P

1 John 3:13

1Jn 3:13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.

In looking at v13, it is important to appreciate how much a believer's expectations will impact their life. [Proverbs 13:12](#) says it this way,

Pr 13:12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick, But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.

I.e., if someone has an expectation that something is going to happen or that someone is going to be a certain way or that a situation will work out in a particular manner, but none of that happens as planned, then it has the potential to upset them in a very strong way. They may become depressed and discouraged. Someone may be expecting to get a certain job or maybe get a salary raise, but it does not happen and they become angry and frustrated. The point is that if someone is not prepared for disappointment, inconveniences, and setbacks, then they will have a great deal of trouble being able to cope with life. Life is very good at deferring our expectations and hopes. In [1 John 3:13](#), John addresses what is often times a very grave misconception that many Christians have – that if they do everything right that everyone will be nice and pleasant towards them. Well, nothing could be any further from the truth than that misunderstanding. It is not that the world “may” hate Christians – not at all. The “if” in the Greek language is called a “*fulfilled condition*” and could be translated “**if, as is the case...**”¹ I.e., the world hates believers simply because they are identified with Christ. It is not that they “**might**” hate believers, but it is a fulfilled condition that is normal and ongoing. That is how the passage is to be interpreted. Not everyone expresses their hatred the same way, but just try and witness to an intelligent, educated, and financially successful well to do business person and see how far you may get with them. I doubt that they will listen to you very long, and chances are that they will most likely not want to have much to do with you in the future. Why? It is because you are identified with Christ.

Now, this passage through [1 John 3:15](#) is simply a continuation of [1 John 3:11-12](#) and the story of Cain and Abel. In the same way that Cain hated his brother because he was a righteous man who apparently had a meaningful relationship God, John expands and develops this idea by letting us know how we will be perceived by the “**world**”. So, at the very beginning it is important to understand to what the word “**world**” is referring. It is the Greek word “*cosmos*” that refers to everything that is anti-God. It could be anything – ideas, philosophies, worldly principles, educational systems, nations, leaders, economic systems, religions, ambitions, ungodly perspectives, and anything else that operates without biblical principles or understanding. It refers to all of those people no matter who they are or where they live that are lost and without Christ. They live in cultures that are anti-Christ. They have traditions that are anti-God. They are not seeking God, and they do not like God's people. When the word “**world**” is used it can be talking about all of the different kinds of people that are living in the world – what the Bible calls “**nations, peoples, tribes, and tongues**”. [Revelation 7:9 and 11:9](#) say,

Rev 7:9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,

Rev 11:9 **Then *those* from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves.**

The word is speaking about all of humanity who are living their life completely alienated from God and who are dead in their sins. The world's ideas about life and eternity are worthless and have no value because they are utterly disconnected from God, from His word, and from His truth. It is speaking about those people who continue to live in sin and disobedience to the word of God even when they know that what He says is true. [Romans 1:18-23](#) boldly declares the following,

Ro 1:18 **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.**

[Romans 1:29-32](#) gives further characteristics of their life and actually states that they are “**haters of God**”.

Ro 1:29 **being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, ³⁰ backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.**

This is the “**world**” to which John is referring. It is not a nice world. It is not a world that holds the things of God in high esteem. It is not a world that cares for the truth or for the people who come to know God and Christ in a very personal and saving way. The “**world**” represents everything that is in defiance, disobedience, and rebelliousness against Christ. It must be understood that when John speaks about this particular word that the “**world**” includes all of its ideas, opinions, positions, viewpoints, beliefs, mindsets, and philosophies that are ungoverned and uncontrolled by the word of God. This is Satan's world and includes all of his evil, malicious, and wicked ideas that he has unleashed into the world. All that he promotes and all that he encourages and stimulates in the hearts of men is anti-God. At times it may be disguised as that which is benevolent and purposeful, but his ultimate design is to use anything, good or bad, for his purpose of deceiving every person who is alive. He is relentless, persistent, and ruthless in his efforts to destroy man and everything associated with God, and that includes all of God's people and all of God's truth. So, if someone is going to understand this passage in [1 John](#), then they must understand that literally everything and everyone who is in the world, but not in Christ will ultimately be opposed to everything for which the believer stands. This is not a pretty picture of the Christian life, but it is an accurate picture and it cannot be ignored if believers are to be overcomers.

In v13, the phrase “**do not marvel**” is in the present tense, imperative mood. It is the only command in v13-15, so it becomes a very important introductory phrase. Obviously, whenever an author gives a command, it is generally because they are concerned with someone’s behavior or how they may react to something. Once again, as has been taught often, the Lord is not nearly as concerned with what happens to us as He is with how we respond to what happens to us. There are many difficult and trying circumstances that will embrace everyone’s life at some time or another. We could go so far as to say that those moments are inevitable in a believer’s life. There is no way to escape the trials, the various hardships and troubles, and the difficult times in life. They are inevitable, unavoidable, and certain, so the last thing that God wants us to do is to be surprised at what may take place in our life. [James 1:2 – 4](#) says the following,

Jas 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

These three verses clearly teach that God wants the believer to “**know**” something before the trials and testings may actually come. It is the idea of being spiritually, emotionally, and mentally prepared before something actually happens. In this case, James says that the believer needs to understand that when their faith is tested and tried, that it produces the spiritual quality and attribute of endurance and perseverance in their life. Now, if someone’s expectation is that they do not deserve trials or difficulties, then they will begin to complain against God and what he has allowed to take place in their life. Ultimately, they will become bitter if their response to the difficulties continues to persist. The very thing that God is using to conform them to the image of Christ becomes the very thing that they resent. So in essence, they will find themselves fighting against and resisting the very work of the Holy Spirit in their life. It must be understood that in the sovereignty of God that He allows innumerable difficulties in every believer’s life. Why? It is so that He can create the necessary changes and trust that need to be developed in the believer’s life. So what are His tools? His tools are trials, difficulties, hardships, and very uncomfortable circumstances.

[1 Peter 4:12-14](#) follows up on this idea and says,

1Pe 4:12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

Peter says not to think that a “**fiery trial**” is something strange. Now, no matter how someone may interpret the phrase “**fiery trial**”, it certainly cannot be anything that would be enjoyable or fun. To the contrary, it is something that by design is very difficult. It can bring out the best in a person or the worst in a person dependent on how they respond to the trial. So the overall principle that clearly needs to be understood is one that we have addressed very often. It is the principle that God does not want the believer to react to his circumstances, but simply to respond to them in a way that honors Christ.

Now, what does not come out in the [1 John 3:13](#) text is that the phrase “**do not marvel**” is in a construction in the Greek language which forbids the continuance of an action that is already going on.²

In other words, John is commanding his readers to stop marveling and wondering at something that should not be taking them by surprise. From the construction of this phrase, it appears that his audience has been complaining, criticizing, protesting, and grumbling about difficult events that are happening in their life. In essence, what they are saying is that they disapprove of the sovereign outworking of God in their life. They are disgruntled, discontent, displeased, and most likely angered and irritated with the trials. In a broad-brush statement, it would be correct to say that a believer negatively reacting to trials is evidence of the very immaturity that God wants to address, and He has to use the very difficult moments as the test. No Christian, no matter how mature they may be, is exempt from this process. It is inevitable and it is necessary in order to grow in a way that honors Christ. There is not one individual in the entire Bible who God used in a spiritually significant way who did not undergo any “**fiery trials**” - not one. Every believer must be matured through God ordained difficult moments.

Maybe a better way to say what v13 means would simply be to say “**stop marveling**” or “**stop being astonished**”. The word “**marvel**” means to be struck with admiration or astonishment, so from the context of these verses it clearly refers to the latter.³ John is telling his readers to stop being astonished at what is taking place in their life. The NIV and the AMP versions simply say “**do not be surprised**”. In fact, this is the same exact word that Jesus utilized Nicodemus in [John 3:7](#) which says,

Jn 3:7 Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

Nicodemus was utterly astonished and completely dumbfounded at what Jesus was saying to him. If we had been there he would have been so shocked and bewildered by Jesus’s statement that he would have been speechless. It was as if he could not believe what Christ had just communicated. What Jesus said was so foreign to the way that Nicodemus thought that in reality what Nicodemus thought was so far removed from the truth that if he did not respond properly he would die in his sins.

So from a very practical perspective, there is a very vital truth in [1 John 3:13](#) that God wants us to clearly understand, and that truth is that the world will literally “**hate**” us because we are Christians. The word “**hate**” is the Greek word “*miseo*” and it literally means to detest, and especially to persecute. It means to be hateful toward someone. It is a word that is especially used of malicious and unjustifiable feelings toward someone else.⁴ The obvious example in the New Testament is Christ. He was hated unjustifiably to the point that no matter what He did or what He said, it was always twisted and used against Him. The Bible is clear that in the last days that men will call evil good and good evil. It is all because they have a hatred for God and a hatred for His truth and His people. Certainly, if we are living in the very last days which I assume that we are, then of all people we should not be amazed or astonished at how the world perceives us. Clearly they will hate us because we stand with Christ. [John 3:20](#) says,

Jn 3:20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

[John 15:18-19](#) says this about Christians,

Jn 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before *it hated* you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

Please do not miss John's point - the world is going to hate Christians. That is his point. That is what he is clearly trying to communicate. No matter how nice and benevolent and kind and gracious a believer may be towards those who are lost, eventually their disregard for Christ will be evidenced in their hatred of the Christian. This hatred will be evident in what is said about believers and in how they are perceived and subsequently treated. During the Tribulation, Christians will simply be martyred – all of them. The Greek word “**hate**” implies that the desire of the world is to persecute the believer, and that is exactly what will happen during that period. Just think of what happened to Christians in the first century. They were impaled on stakes, dipped in tar, and then used as torches while other believers were literally sacrificed to wild animals for people to watch them being killed unmercifully. It is a settled animosity, bitterness, antagonism, and hostility towards believers. Jesus prayed this about his disciples in [John 17:14](#) when He said,

Jn 17:14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

So, what is the ultimate message to believers in [1 John 3:13](#)? It is simple – do not be astonished at what the world will say about us and how it will eventually perceive us and ultimately treat us. It may be your family members, your coworkers, your neighbors, and even people who do not know you. As we draw closer to the Second Coming of Christ, the Scriptures clearly seem to indicate that the hostilities and resentments toward Christians will greatly increase. We will become the designated scapegoats for the world's hatred of Christ, and those hostilities and that hatred will intensify as we draw closer to the end. We live in a world that is filled with spiritual lies, spiritual hucksters, and deceiving spirits. [1 Timothy 4:1](#) says,

1Ti 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

Demons and demonic activity are everywhere. The forces of evil are present, active, and will stop at nothing to destroy everyone and anything associated with Jesus Christ. The encouragement for us as believers is to take John's command to heart. Do not be alarmed at the world's hatred for you. Do not be intimidated because the world hates God and everyone associated with Him. Do not be afraid of what the world may do to you. Jesus told His disciples in [Matthew 10:28](#),

Mt 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Rather than being alarmed, frightened, stressed, and shocked by the world's hostility to the things of God, everyone who is a believer in Christ should be expecting it. It is the believer's knowledge of what to expect that will strengthen them during the times of opposition and hatred. The church's role is not to be like the world and to hate the unbeliever. Our role is to confront unbelievers with the person of Christ, with His glorious salvation, and with His amazing grace. We are the messengers because we have the message, and because of that we cannot allow the world's hostility towards us to in any way diminish the message of God's salvation to them. We must be bold even in the face of hatred and opposition. We have no idea whom God has chosen and where His irresistible grace will rest next. What we do know, however, is the message of salvation provided in the gospel. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation and it is able to save the most evil unbelievers no matter what their distorted beliefs

about God may actually be. It is able to penetrate the hardest heart and reach down into a man's soul and completely regenerate it so that he may be saved. As Jesus told his disciples in [Luke 12:32](#),

Lk 12:32 Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

ENDNOTES

¹ Wuest, 1 John, 152.

² Wuest, 1 John, 152.

³ Zodhiates, 719.

⁴ Strong, 1240.

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